

## **Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)**

### **PA 517.12 Pennsylvania State WHIP Plan**

#### **Pennsylvania Habitat and Species Priorities**

Grassland Habitat, especially native grasses, either native warm season grasses or native cool season grasses. This habitat benefits declining species statewide, especially ground-nesting songbirds, through establishment and appropriate management of new grasslands or improvement of existing poorly managed grasslands. Some species to benefit include Meadowlark, Bobolink, Dickcissel, Henslow's Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Bobwhite quail

Partners include the Pennsylvania Game Commission and Pheasants Forever.

Outreach Options include:

- Rural landowners not eligible for other conservation programs such as CRP or EQIP
- Improvement of habitat on previously mined land.
- Lands that had been covered in CRP contracts and are due to expire, where there is a potential to keep some or all in grassland habitat cover.

Practices include:

- Conservation Cover (327)
- Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645)

Application evaluation and ranking process and criteria: Will give preference to sites with known historical populations of T&E or declining species; larger sites; sites that do not require significant soil erosion control practices; sites that do not require unusual soil remediation or soil fertility or pH amendments; projects that do not have an active regulatory or program obligation to establish cover; privately owned land.

There are large numbers of acres that could be managed for grassland habitat. Many of these areas are agricultural and may qualify for either EQIP or CRP/CREP, which would be a preferred source of funding if available in order to reserve scarce WHIP funds for sites that otherwise would not be improved. While current WHIP allocations may be a limiting factor, a target is to establish or improve 500 to 1,000 acres of grassland habitat per year through WHIP.

Bog Turtle (*Clemmys muhlenbergii*), a threatened species located primarily in southeastern and southcentral Pennsylvania. Primary habitat is open sunny wetland areas and adjacent buffer areas without significant tree and shrub growth.

Partners include: US Fish and Wildlife Service, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, Environmental Defense.

Practices include:

- Brush Management (314)
- Conservation Cover (327)

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- Fence (382)
- Prescribed Grazing (528)
- Wetland Restoration (657)
- Wetland Enhancement (659)
- Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management (644)

Application evaluation and ranking process and criteria: Will give preference to sites with a historical presence of bog turtles; sites that do not require structural wetland restoration or remediation work (sites requiring wetland restoration will be preferentially funded through Wetland Reserve Program); larger sites; sites with connectivity to other bog turtle habitat; projects that do not have a regulatory obligation to establish habitat; privately owned land.

There are many sites in southeast Pennsylvania that could potentially be bog turtle habitat. Environmental Defense has approximately 20 confirmed high priority sites where habitat could be improved. Goal is to sign contracts to improve habitat on 5 to 10 new sites per year using WHIP funds.

#### Fish Passage & Habitat Restoration

Objective(s): Increase mileage of rivers and streams accessible to aquatic species movement and migration:

Partner(s) include the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC). PFBC in turn works closely with American Rivers, a private non-profit organization.

Practices include:

- Fish Passage (396)
- Critical Area Planting (342)
- Obstruction Removal (500)
- Stream Habitat Improvement and Management (395)
- Streambank and Shoreline Protection (580)
- Tree/Shrub Establishment (612)

Application evaluation and ranking process and criteria: Will give preference to projects on streams with T & E or declining species; projects that are highly rated by PFBC; privately owned land.

PFBC maintains a priority list of approximately 50 dams statewide that would result to a benefit to aquatic species, especially migratory species, if removed. Projects are regularly added to this list as sites are identified and landowners indicate interest in participating in a Fish Passage improvement project. Removal of dams can commonly cost between \$50,000 and \$100,000 per site, not included associated revegetation and streambank stabilization work. Through a partnership effort with other sponsors, WHIP may be able to participate in between 3 and 10 projects per year.

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**Additional habitats and species of concern options to be developed include:**

Early Successional Habitat Development & Maintenance; targeting species such as woodcock.

Partner(s) include: Pennsylvania Game Commission

Practices:

- Brush Management (314)
- Conservation Cover (327)
- Early Successional Habitat Development/Management
- Tree/Shrub Establishment (612)
- Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645)

Massasaugua Rattlesnake (*Sistrurus catenatus catenatus*), a Pennsylvania Endangered species occurring in northwestern Pennsylvania, in open wetland and adjacent grassy upland areas.

Partners include: Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission

Vernal Pools

Partner(s) include: Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission

**d Performance Measurement and Accountability**

For all priorities, NRCS's Progress Reporting System and Protracts as a minimum will be used to evaluate performance. Specific measures to be used as a minimum are:

- Non-federal land treated for fish and wildlife habitat, acres

Units of individual practices planned and implemented will also be tracked.

**References**

USDA-NRCS Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program national program manual, 440-GM-517

Pennsylvania's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (PA-CWCS)

<http://www.pgc.state.pa.us/pgc/cwp/view.asp?a=496&q=162067>